

***U.S. Department of Justice***

***United States Attorney  
Eastern District of Virginia***

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**PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Norfolk, Virginia** – Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that Helen Carr, age 55, of Akron, Ohio, pled guilty to count one of an indictment charging her with conspiring and participating in a fraudulent Internet scheme to steal credit card numbers and personal information from customers of America Online (AOL). Carr faces a maximum prison term of five years and a \$250,000 fine when sentenced on January 20, 2004, by United States District Judge Jerome B. Friedman.

Carr previously appeared before the Court following her arrest on August 5, 2003 upon a criminal complaint. On August 28, 2003, a Norfolk federal grand jury returned a one-count indictment against Carr charging her with conspiring to unlawfully possess 15 or more unauthorized access devices (credit cards). The maximum penalties provided by statute for this offense are five years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and the forfeiture of personal property used in the commission of the offense.

From January 2001 through March 2002, Carr and others used a fraud technique known as "phishing," in which scam artists attempt to trick Internet users into divulging their credit card account numbers, screen names, passwords, and other personal information. As part of this scheme, Carr and other conspirators sent mass e-mails ("spam") to AOL subscribers throughout the United States and in several foreign countries purporting to be from AOL's Security Department. These e-mails informed the recipients that AOL's last attempt to bill their credit cards had failed and that they needed to supply updated information to AOL to avoid termination of their accounts. To do so, subscribers allegedly were directed to click on an enclosed link that re-directed them to a fake web page, entitled the "AOL Billing Center," which directed the subscribers to supply personal information about themselves and their accounts and to provide current and alternate credit card account numbers. This information, however, was then forwarded to free, web-based e-mail accounts set up by the conspirators, which Helen Carr and others accessed to obtain the victims' credit card numbers for their own use.

The conspiracy came to light when an FBI agent in Norfolk, Virginia, received the fraudulent spam e-mail at his home computer and opened an investigation to identify the perpetrators behind the scam. The FBI agent then traced the scam to computers located at residences in Jeannette, Pennsylvania; Sparta, Michigan; and defendant Carr's hometown of Akron, Ohio. Pursuant to court-authorized warrants, FBI agents searched all three locations and

identified three online conspirators, including Helen Carr and George Patterson. Following the execution of the search warrant at his residence, George Patterson pled guilty to a criminal information on April 1, 2003, and was sentenced on July 23, 2003, to 37 months in prison. Defendant Carr remains on bond pending sentencing.

McNulty said, "Internet 'phishing' for credit card numbers and personal information is thievery. This defendant was hooked by her own scheme."

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Robert J. Krask is prosecuting the case.

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